

Testimony
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
March 5, 2009

**HB 6335 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
HEALTH CENTER FACILITIES PLAN**

Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Kim Lachut of Andover, CT and I am here today to speak in support of the HB 6335 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH CENTER FACILITIES PLAN.

I am here as a former patient and would like to share with you my experience with the wonderful doctors at the UConn Health Center. One year ago, I woke up with double vision in my right eye and a painful headache. It was alarming enough to me that I asked my husband to take me to my local emergency room to have it looked at. Once at the hospital, we endured many many hours of waiting, an MRI and no answers. I was sent home diagnosed with vertigo and told my symptoms would improve within 24 hours. Within 24 hours, my symptoms had not improved and even seemed to be getting worse so it was back to the ER. Once again, I was told to go see a local ophthalmologist as they could not find any reason for me not to be improving. A few days later I was at the ophthalmologist's, enduring more tests, to again be told, that they are not sure what is going on, but, based on your symptoms, we think it could be MS. They asked if I knew of a good neurologist because I needed to see one immediately. By now I had been suffering with the unknown and out of work for over a week and now had to find a neurologist on my own as they had no one to refer me to.

While this may not seem like a life threatening story, what I have yet to mention is that my family has a history with neurologists, MRI's and everything having to do with the brain. Six years ago, I lost my dad to a brain tumor. Within five short months my family became well versed in neurological terms, reading MRI's and medical uncertainties. So when I was told I needed an MRI and then also needed a neurologist, I immediately started to think the worst. This only added to my anxiety.

Not knowing a local neurologist, I was fortunate enough to have a friend contact Dr. Deckers at the Health Center who was able to get me an appointment with neurologist, Dr. Louise McCullough. To say that Dr. McCullough cares about her patients does not even begin to scratch the surface of who she is. She was able to fit me into her schedule immediately and set aside her afternoon, running tests, setting up lab work and just getting to know me and my family's medical history. Her preliminary tests almost immediately ruled out MS and any type of brain tumor. She was convinced it was something manageable and was able to have all my lab tests done the same day. Before I left the hospital, she gave me

her email address and told me to contact her anytime with questions or new symptoms.

After returning home late that afternoon, there was a phone message from Dr. McCollough. Based on her initial findings she diagnosed me with a rare eye disorder called Tolosa-Hunt syndrome and she wanted me to get me in to see her colleague, a neuro-ophthalmologist by the name of Dr. David Waitzman. She had already been in contact with his office and had an appointment set up for me that week. She also informed me that she was going to meet me there so that she could collaborate with him on my care. Her help did not stop there. Over the course of the next few days, anytime she received test results, she emailed me the results to help put my mind at ease until we could get a final diagnosis from Dr. Waitzman.

Once I got in to see Dr. Waitzman it only took him a few minutes of examination to confirm Dr. McCollough's diagnosis. Together they planned out my treatment which consisted of various doses of steroids over the next several months. Dr. Waitzman was quick to give me all his contact numbers, in case anything should change. I was told to contact him anytime, day or night. Within weeks my sight was back to normal and all the other symptoms had subsided.

If it had not been for these two wonderful doctors and their collaborative efforts, the damage to my eye could have been permanent. Both of these doctors went above and beyond my expectations and helped ease my worst fears. Their compassion and understanding of my fears is something I can not put into words. I am truly grateful to the UConn Health Center for bringing these two doctors into my life.

It is because of this experience that I will continue to look to the UConn Health Center whenever I have a medical emergency. If this is how they are teaching future generations of doctors to treat their patients, this is where I want to be when I need a doctor. We need to continue to produce doctors who truly care about their patients as Dr. McCollough and Dr. Waitzman do.

This is why I highly support the partnership with Hartford Hospital and the UConn Health Center. This is important to the state of Connecticut, but more important to those of us who have been helped by this wonderful hospital.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to speak and share my story. I ask that you support HB 6335 as it moves through the legislative process.